

## The 23<sup>rd</sup> Biennial IRSCL Congress “Possible & Impossible Children”

Toronto, Canada, 29 July – 2 August 2017

DOI: 10.21066/carcl.libri.2017-06(02).0017

This summer, the International Research Society for Children’s Literature (IRSCL) convened its 23<sup>rd</sup> biennial congress. Held from 29 July to 2 August, the Congress was hosted by York University in Toronto. This was the third time the Congress has been held in Canada (it was previously held in Quebec, Montreal in 1985, and Calgary in 1999).

This year’s theme, “Possible & Impossible Children: Intersections of Children’s Literature and Childhood Studies”, brought together around 400 scholars from 50 countries, gathered to discuss a variety of topics related to the production, representation, and reception of all-media texts for children and young adults. As the Congress convenors Cheryl Cowdy and Peter Cumming summed up, IRSCL17 consisted of almost 300 presentations, 10 keynotes by internationally recognised scholars, and three roundtables.

The opening keynote, held on Saturday 29 July, was delivered by past presidents of IRSCL Sandra Beckett, Clare Bradford, Mavis Reimer, Kimberley Reynolds, and John Stephens. The following day saw a keynote by Peter Hunt entitled “From Librarianship to Childhood Studies: The Curious Journey of Children’s Literature”, which also reflected on the 2017 Congress presentations. Analysing all the abstracts, Hunt found the following thematic preoccupations among the 300 presentations: 18% theoretical, 19% child/childhood centred, 35% concerned primarily with books, and 40% concerned with representations of the child/childhood in books. He also found that 6% of the presenters were theorists, 19% were child/childhood centred, 75% were book centred, 35% were concerned primarily with books, and 40% dealt with representations of children/childhood in books.

On Sunday, all the participants could take part in the first roundtable: “Indigeneity & Children’s and Young Adult Literature”. This event gathered artists from Indigenous communities, who brought to the audience’s attention the complexity of the territory they were occupying at that moment. Each of the three sessions held on the same day were divided into 12 or 13 streams (the same was true of the sessions held on the other days, with the exception of Session 6 held on Tuesday, which included 10 streams). Among the thirteen interesting panels in Session 1 (including those on “Misfit Children”, “Literary Adaptations of Children’s Literature”, and “Animals & Childhood”), I chose to attend presentations on concepts of adulthood (held by Victoria Ford Smith) and family (Lies Wesseling), and then joined the panel on serialising girlhood, where Sara K. Day’s presentation examined the use of polyphony in some girls’ series, and argued that their multiple perspectives do not help female narrators build narrative authority, but rather deny it.

Session 2 was as diverse as the previous one, encompassing panels on children in British post-war fantasy, L.M. Montgomery’s imaginings of complex childhoods, mediated childhood in different media, childhood in the context of war, as well as LGBTQ and diasporic childhoods. In the “Mediating Fictions” panel, Lee Talley examined archive and canon texts, stressing the importance of a childhood studies approach to children’s literature, as well as of listening to the lived experiences of children and the childhood memories they retain as adults. Based on her analysis of US and Canadian reading reports, Elisabeth Gruner questioned minority youth reading in recent YA literature. Karin E.

Westman's presentation was dedicated to the realism, readers, and contemporary politics of *Harry Potter*.

The final Sunday session included panels on alcohol and drugs misuse in young people's texts, children's rights in children's literature, graphic novels, non-fiction, sexuality, space and place, nation and childhood, etc. Once again, I wanted to hear papers from different panels. I attended the presentation by Petros Panaou (and Jenn Graff). Their meta-analysis of "How to Write Children's Books" showed how authors of these types of guides imagine/construct their audience in a certain way, and how this construction can be questioned by new theoretical findings in explorations of children's literature and culture, especially such crucial concepts as "child" or "childhood". Lynne Vallone critically discussed the political and ethical implications of constructing the foetus as a child and provided impressive examples of constructing the foetal identity in poetry.

Monday 31 July saw only one session, following the keynote by Suzanne Pouliot ("Réception critique des oeuvres publiées en littérature pour la jeunesse de 1920 à 2000, au Québec"). My primary research interests led me to the panel on narratology, leaving me no opportunity to hear discussions in other interesting panels, which included the following: "Indigenous Childhoods"; "Digital Culture"; "Philosophy & Childhood"; "Picturebook Childhoods"; "Boyhood"; "Dystopian Youth"; "Folktales and Folklore"; and others. In the session on narratology, Luis Mario Reyes Pérez examined superheroes through their relation to orphanhood, which he associated with the concept of melancholia. Tharini Viswanath provided a narratological analysis of the Indian picturebook *The-Why-Why Girl*, focusing primarily on the issues of agency and voice. Mike Cadden delivered a paper on the impact children's authors have on readers' empathy via character construction. His rhetorical-narrative approach was fresh, well argued, and enhanced by visual representation.

Although there were no presentations after lunch, the afternoon programme consisted of interesting activities. After the special meeting on the "Statement of IRSCS Principles", those delegates who applied for excursions at registration went to downtown Toronto to experience the biggest Canadian city. I am very glad I applied for the Toronto Public Library excursion. Tours of the Osborne Early Children's and the Merrill Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy collections were short, but very informative and full of interesting exhibits. The "Medium & the Messengers: Local Artists, Globalized Genres, and Transnational Audiences" roundtable was the most fascinating event of all. Participants Zetta Elliott, Shauntay Grant, Rukhsana Khan, and Vivek Shraya shared their life stories, artist's philosophies, work, and so much more with us. It was stimulating, amusing, and touching at the same time. I am sure that the parallel events – the visit to the Toronto International Film Festival and the "Mediated Possibilities: Young People as Creators, Producers and Audiences of Film" roundtable – were interesting as well.

On Tuesday 1 August, the working part of the Congress started with the fourth keynote by Robin Bernstein, dedicated to going-to-bed books. Two sessions were held that day. Session 5 included a panel conversation with Jack Zipes, as well as the following panels: "Adaptation & Animation"; "Narratology # 2 (Authors & Readers)"; and "Cognitive Childhoods". Since my own presentation was part of the narratology panel, I had to miss the reflections of Jack Zipes, which, as I learned during lunch, were enchanting. In my presentation with Smiljana Narančić Kovač, I explored how the concept of the implied reader

is used in theoretical considerations of children's literature and questioned the possibility of the concept of the implied child reader. The same panel included three other papers: Mary Galbraith talked about the unspeakability of literature and examined its implications for the critical emancipatory practice of childhood studies. Erica Kanesaka Kalnay focused on spatial issues in the Victorian novel and children's fiction of the Golden Age. William Thompson examined the relationship between narrator, character, and implied reader in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

In the second session of the day, I decided to listen to talks on the "fat child". Åsa Warnqvist showed how "fat" characters were constructed and depicted in 20<sup>th</sup>-century children's classics. Relying on fat studies, queer theory, and gurlesque studies, Mia Österlund examined how child protagonists interact with "fat" female adults in contemporary Nordic picturebooks. Comparing these examples to those featured in the first presentation, one can see a difference and distinct progress in representations of obesity in children's literature. Maria Jönsson closed the panel with a talk on body depictions in graphic novels for tweens. Other panels in Session 6 included, for example: "Breaking Down the Wall: Culture and Understanding in Latino/a Children's Literature"; "Germany's National Socialist Children's Literature"; "Childhood & World War I"; and "Youth Culture". Tuesday also saw the IRSCL members' meeting and Board election day, and included more relaxing activities such as a walk around the Black Creek Pioneer Village, and the Congress dinner.

The last day of the Congress included one keynote (Daniel Goldin Halfon and Michèle Petit in conversation with Evelyn Arizpe: "Poverty and Riches in Children's Literature and the Promotion of Reading: Taking Paths Back and Forth Between Latin America and the 'First World'"), one session and two showcase panels. Session 7 included panels on constructions of childhood; genres; television, adults and children, etc. I attended Victoria Flanagan's presentation about constructing the relationship between feminine identity and digital space in contemporary YA fiction. In a different panel, I heard Joanna Krongold's paper which explored Anne Frank's narrative strategies and stylistic tools, and questioned the (im)possibility of multiple versions of Frank in the diary and beyond it, as well as the presentation by Olga Bukhina on new ways of talking about Soviet history to young readers.

The final activity before the closing remarks was a showcase divided into two panels: one dedicated to journals and the other to research centres. The first showcase included reputable and well-known journals on children's & YA literature, such as *Bookbird*; *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*; *Children's Literature*; *International Research in Children's Literature*; *Barnboken*; *The Lion and the Unicorn*; *Jeunesse*; and *Libri & Liberi* (promoted by Editor-in-Chief Smiljana Narančić Kovač). The research centres presented in the second showcase panel included the following: the Centre for Young People's Literature and Culture (Poland); the Research Centre Youth – Media – Education (Germany); Seven Stories (UK); the Swedish Institute for Children's Books; the International Forum for Research in Children's Literature (UK); and the Centre for Research in Young People's Texts and Cultures (Canada).

In place of a conclusion, I would like to say that I hope to have the chance to participate in the IRSCL 2019 Congress in Stockholm, which was presented on several occasions in Toronto by its main organiser, Åsa Warnqvist. Contrary to its topic, "Silence and Silencing in Children's Literature", it was promoted loudly. Just as I did at the 23<sup>rd</sup> biennial congress

in Toronto, I look forward to learning in Stockholm in 2019 from respected children's literature scholars, meeting colleagues from all around the world, and participating in vivid discussions and excursions, with the additional pleasure of experiencing the Swedish *fika*.

Corinna Jerkin

## “Translation Studies and Children's Literature: Current Topics and Future Perspectives”

KU Leuven and the University of Antwerp, Brussels/Antwerp, Belgium, 18–20 October 2017

DOI: 10.21066/carcl.libri.2017-06(02).0018

From 18 to 20 October 2017, KU Leuven and the University of Antwerp welcomed about 80 scholars from 24 different countries and 4 continents for a conference on the intersection between children's literature studies and translation studies.

Organised by Elke Brems (KU Leuven) and Vanessa Joosen (University of Antwerp), the Conference was occasioned by the academic retirement of Jan Van Coillie (KU Leuven), a pioneer in the field, who not only published reference works such as *Children's Literature in Translation: Challenges and Strategies* (2006), but is also an active writer and translator of children's literature himself. The first Conference day at the Brussels campus of KU Leuven therefore started in the early evening of 18 October with Van Coillie's opening lecture titled “Diversity Can Change the World. Children's Literature, Translation and Images of Childhood”. In his presentation, he pointed out the possibilities of the translators' position as “bridge-builders between cultures” that help further children's international outlook, while stressing at the same time the threat that globalisation and the English-dominated book market could pose to diversity. The same day also included 13 workshops for M.A. students from different universities given by professional translators of children's literature. The masterclasses dealt with the translation of different genres of children's literature from English, German, French, Spanish, and Polish for the Dutch market. Among the translators who gave the workshops were, for example, Maria Postema, who has translated YA novels such as the *Twilight* series or *The Hunger Games* into Dutch, and writer and translator Bea de Koster, who talked about translating picturebooks. The workshops were followed by a panel discussion during which the translators gave some practical insight into how they first started out in this field, shared strategies on how to get translating jobs, the challenges they face in their work, and their favourite anecdotes. The aim of the masterclasses was to link translation research and translation practice. Some of the translators also participated in the Conference.

The second day of the Conference, which also took place in Brussels, started off with a keynote lecture by Emer O'Sullivan (Leuphana University, Lüneburg) entitled “Visualising Nonsense: Illustration as Intersemiotic Translation”. The panels that followed looked into the state of translated children's literature in the “impenetrable” UK market and included (among others) presentations on the relation between the lack of translated European children's literature in Britain and Brexit (Clémentine Beauvais), and those dealing with sociological analyses of translation flows of Flemish children's literature into English-